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ABSTRACT

Studies have indicated that subjects with more years of education show a positive attitude toward older persons. The present study investigated the effects of other variables, in this case race and social class, in relation to attitudes toward older persons. A sample group of high school juniors and seniors whose ages ranged from 16 to 18 were given a questionnaire based on the Kogan Attitudes Toward Old People Scale. The subjects consisted of 48 blacks and 50 whites; 46 belonged to the lower income class and 52 to the middle income class. The results of the study showed almost no effect on attitudes toward older people based on race and social class. Combining data from this study with a previous study giving a total of 194 subjects showed a relationship between number of years of education and a more positive attitude towards the elderly. The tabulated scores and a list of references are included. (EC)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AGED AS A FUNCTION OF RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS

A paper presented to the Section on
Psychological and Social Sciences of
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Attitudes toward the Aged as a Function of Race and Social Class

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In a prior study (Thorson, Hancock, and Whatley, 1973 and 1974), it was reported that experimental data indicated more positive attitudes toward older persons were held by test subjects who had a greater number of years of education, and more negative attitudes on the part of subjects who were themselves older. That study analyzed results obtained from administering Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (Kogan, 1961) to sample groups of students (N=61) and practitioners in service delivery to the elderly (N=55).

Parallel research has appeared since that first study was completed that in part confirms the reported results. Sister Marion Gillis (1973) has published data indicating a trend toward more positive attitudes as the number of years of education of test subjects increases, but found ambiguous results when testing for the variable of subjects' age, length of time spent with the elderly, and type of employing agency. She cites studies by Campbell (1971) and Brown (1967) that confirm the positive relationship between level of education and rejection of stereotypes of the aged. Sister Marion used a 48 item instrument based on one developed by Lowy (1968) that she had revised, and administered it to groups of registered nurses (N=32), licensed practical nurses (N=28), and nurses aides (N=26) working in five different nursing homes and one general hospital. Using a one-way

analysis of variance to determine difference in attitudes by test subjects' age, level of education, length of time working with the aged, and type of employing agency, she found a significant effect ($p = .01$) only for the variable of years of education. She concluded that, although the trend did not hold true in every case, educational level did demonstrate an effect on attitudes, and that other untested variables might also have an effect.

Method

In the previous research reported by Thorson, Hancock, and Whatley, it was suggested that the variables of subjects' race and social class might also have an effect on their attitude toward older persons. The objective of the present study was to follow-up with additional subjects and test for these variables.

To control for age and education, a sample group (N=98) was drawn that consisted of individuals who were at nearly the same age and had the same number of years in education. It would be highly desirable if this group was heterogeneous and consisted of persons that varied by race and social class. The final group consisted of Atlanta high school juniors and seniors whose age ranged from 16 to 18 years. Assistance was received from two of the high school sociology teachers, each of whom knew the test subjects. The teachers administered the test instrument and acted as judges to code the questionnaire by subjects' race and social class. The determination of race was no problem, but social class was a more ambiguous classification. The judges were asked to designate each person who completed the instrument to be either "middle income" or "lower income;" there were no students

who could be called "upper class" in this inner-city school. In cases where the judges could not agree that an individual obviously fit into either one or the other of these admittedly subjective categories; i.e., where a person was "lower-middle income" or when the judges conflicted in their classifications, the questionnaire for that individual was not used. The final group of acceptable questionnaires included 48 blacks and 50 whites, of whom 46 were categorized as lower income and 52 were judged to be middle income. All completed Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (OP) satisfactorily.

The Kogan OP scale is a 34 item Likert-type instrument that asks the respondent to agree or disagree to various degrees with statements about older people. The OP scale has been used in several studies and has been cross-validated by Kogan (1961) and by Silverman (1966).

Results

The completed scales for the high school group were tabulated and analyzed for the variables of race and social status. In an analysis of variance, almost no effect on attitude could be found for either of these variables (see Table 1).

Further analysis was done, combining present data with information gathered for the previously reported study. This gave combined sample groups of 55 practitioners, 61 university undergraduate and graduate students, and 98 high school students. Since the prior test subjects had not been classified by race and social class, comparisons could be drawn for the total group only on the variables of age and

years of education.

Results are shown in Table 1. An analysis of variance of the responses on the OP scale of the combined group of 194 found no significant variation in attitude by subjects' age. This is consistent with the data reported by Gillis. The third analysis tested for variation in attitude by years of education, and this variable was found to be highly significant ($p = .01$). This also could be said to be consistent with the results of studies by Gillis, Campbell, and by Brown.

Implications

Of the 194 subjects who completed the Kogan OP scale, the only significant difference in attitude that was found was by years of education. There was a relationship demonstrated that positive attitude toward the elderly increased with the number of years of education of the test subject (see Table 2). The clear dividing line between groups holding different attitudes was between the non-college groups and those having some post-secondary education. An analysis of the combined group did not demonstrate a significant relationship between subjects' age and attitude toward the aged. Note on Table 2 that the age group 22-35 has the high mean score of 4.88. In the analysis, the score of these 11 individuals out of 194 test subjects did not have a significant effect. However, these persons' attitude variation probably accounts for the high mean score of that group of persons having one or more years of graduate study. In the Atlanta sub-sample, data indicated no important differences in attitude by the variables of race or social class.

This study was limited in that there were no Oriental test subjects, so that the comparisons by race were only between two racial groups, white and black respondents. Also, the classification of subjects by social status in the Atlanta sample group could not be said to be an exact procedure.

Despite these limitations, for the groups tested the variable of education did appear to be a highly significant determinant of attitude. The question remains of why persons with better educations tend to view older people more positively. Possible reasons might be the tendency for persons with fewer years of education to more readily accept untrue stereotypes of old age, and it is possible that those subjects with more years of education have accepted a better role model of the aging. Further research using the OP scale with a randomly selected sample would provide valuable clarification.

TABLE 1

Analysys of Variance by Group and Variable

Analysis	Variable and Sample Group	N	f	$f_{.95}$	$f_{.99}$
1.	Atlanta group, by race and social class	98	.177	2.70	
2.	All sample groups, by age of respondent	194	2.22	2.65	
3.	All sample groups, by education of respondent	194	9.24*	2.65	3.88

*significant at both .05 and .01 levels

TABLE 2

Mean Scores by Age, Education, Race & Social Status

Variable		N	$\bar{X}$
Race and Social Status:	black, low income	37	4.19
	black, middle income	11	4.05
	white, low income	9	4.13
	white, middle income	41	4.12
Age:	under 22	137	4.32
	22-35	11	4.88
	36-55	21	4.37
	over 55	25	4.34
Years of Education:	8 or less	9	4.28
	8-12	117	4.17
	12-16	54	4.69
	Graduate work	14	4.71

higher mean score indicates more positive attitude

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